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ABSTRACT

Partnerships between the South African state and nonstate sectors have become a strategic element in the implementation of education policy. Six policy texts, as exemplars of state support for partnerships, are presented. The notion of partnership is used in a theoretical way so as to suggest reasons for governmental support in the context of contemporary South African education and training. The "White Paper on Education and Training," which proclaimed the pivotal role of partnerships, is briefly discussed followed by some etymological and theoretical insights on partnerships, including the nature of informal partnerships; formal partnerships; post-agreement, formalized partnerships; and statutory partnerships. Ways in which partnerships can be configured are described, as are the reasons for entering into a partnership, such as the inclusion of other stakeholders. The power in partnerships is also detailed as is how such relationships many times are not equitable. Some examples of partnerships currently in effect are provided, followed by a list of factors that limit effective partnerships. The most significant step that will release the potential for partnerships in South African education is to develop procedural guidelines for establishing such associations. (RJM)

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Partnerships in current government education and training policy and practice[1]

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Introduction

In the past, when private sector and non-governmental organisations collaborated with government departments, this was viewed by many as complicity in condoning and supporting apartheid. However, since the 1994 democratic elections of the first non-racial government, partnerships with the state have become acceptable and can now be established legitimately and function in a transparent and accountable manner. Indeed, for education and training, partnerships between the state and non-state sectors have become a strategic element in the implementation of policy and transformation processes. This is apparent in both policy documents and in the practice of government departments and their agencies, to the extent that the Deputy President appointed an Advisory Committee (1997) to report on 'Structural relationships between government and civil society organisations'.

In this paper I first use six policy texts as exemplars of state support for partnerships. I then present the notion of partnership from a theoretical perspective and suggest some of the reasons for its support from government in the context of contemporary South African education and training. Lastly, I describe the experience of one non-statutory partnership in order to examine how power is shared and managed and the issues that limit the partnership. In closing, recommendations are proposed to address these factors.

Partnership in policy documents

i. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) White Paper is probably the first policy text of the Government of National Unity which refers to 'a social partnership' (1994:40-41) for post-apartheid South Africa. The White Paper defines government and 'mass organisations' as 'negotiating partners' that may retain their right to their own interpretation and goals for the RDP. The function

[1] This is a working paper and the ideas expressed are still in a formative stage.

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of this partnership is envisaged as problem solving: to agree to find solutions to constraints such as 'bottlenecks and shortages' that will emerge in the RDP's implementation.

ii. The *White Paper on Education and Training*, gazetted on 15 March 1995, was the first document from the Department of Education to clearly proclaim the pivotal role of partnerships and expands the functions envisaged in the RDP White Paper. Subtitled *Education and training in a democratic South Africa: first steps to develop a new system*, the White Paper states that:

> *(a) recurring theme throughout ... [is] the need to build partnerships for consultation, advocacy, planning and resourcing. It is not possible to list all the parties to such partnerships, but it is important to name the main categories.* (DoE, 1995b:34)

The document then refers to inter-departmental co-operation; collaboration between the national department and provincial Departments of Education; education sub-sectors and their national bodies and coalitions; the parastatal Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC); national organisations of school principals, students, parents, school governing bodies, independent schools, special education needs specialists and subject or discipline specialists; organised business and labour constituencies; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); community-based organisations (CBOs), religions organisations, development agencies, and research bodies; and finally, international development agencies and external partners (1995b:34-35). With particular reference - but not exclusively - to adult basic education and training, the national department anticipates that partnerships will 'undertake planning, arrange public advocacy, sponsor research and development, and mobilise financial resources' (1995b:31). Thus we see partners being extended beyond the RDP's mass organisations and their role being far greater than the identification of bottlenecks and shortages mentioned in the RDP White Paper. Indeed, it is evident that the Department of Education sees non-state partners as playing a pro-active role in education and training and sharing some decision-making and responsibility with the state.

Brief comparative table showing the shift in policy

Policy document	White Paper on Reconstruction and Development	White Paper on Education and Training (1)
Year of publication	1994	1995
Primary Partner/s	Government	Government
Secondary Partner/s	Mass organisations	Other national departments and provincial Departments of Education; education sub-sectors and their national bodies and coalitions; the parastatal Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC); national organisations of school principals, students, parents, school governing bodies, independent schools, special education needs specialists and subject or discipline specialists; organised business and labour constituencies; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); community-based organisations (CBOs), religions organisations, development agencies, and research bodies; and finally, international development agencies and external partners
Role/s	Find solutions to bottlenecks and shortages	Consultation, advocacy, planning and resourcing;

iii. The Department of Labour's *Green Paper for a Skills Development Strategy* states that one of the principles underpinning the new system is 'partnerships between the public and private sectors, joint control... and shared costs arrangements' (DoL, 1997:2). This reiterates the notion of shared decision-making and responsibility as signalled in the Department of Education's first White Paper

iv. The theme of partnership also emerges in legislation promulgated by the new Government. The *South African Qualifications Authority Act (no. 58 of 1995)* spells out a broad range of stakeholders who will be represented on the structure of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Further, one of their functions will be to develop and implement the National Qualifications Framework 'after consultation and in co-operation with the departments of state, statutory bodies, companies, bodies and institutions responsible for education, training and the certification of standards...' (OP, 1995:6). In the Act, shared decision-making

and responsibility among the social partners are institutionalised and structured in SAQA.

v. The *National Education Policy Act, (no. 27 of 1996)* empowers the Minister to define policy for co-operation between national and provincial government departments, local governments and non-governmental organisations with the purpose of advancing national education policy and the RDP, and international relations in the field of education. The Act provides for 'broad public participation in the development of education policy and the representation of stakeholders in the governance of all aspects of the education system' and stipulates that the Minister may only determine policy after consultation with various named structures and stakeholders. For this purpose the Act establishes several statutory structures for governance and management functions - all characterised by relevant stakeholder representation.

vi. The *South African Schools Act* provides another example of a statutory structure being used to institutionalise partnership. In this case, the school governing body is the structure through which parents, educators, non-educators and learners (in secondary schools) are brought into a partnership to govern the local public school. To this end the governing body is given extensive powers on a wide range of matters in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning at that school.

Nature of partnership

A recent search of my university library database indicated that most literature about partnerships has emerged from the study of commerce and law, in which partnerships involve agreements over responsibilities, liabilities and dividends are clearly defined. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a partner as a 'sharer'. This may be an individual or a group who shares with another person or group, in or of something. The partners are associated together in some 'business' and they share the 'risks and profits'. Thus, the discourse of partnership developed in markets, boardrooms and courtrooms, is being adopted and assimilated by the democratic state, in this case led by the popular, mass-based African National Congress whose voters are predominantly

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from the working and peasant classes. Further discussion of this significant trend is beyond the scope of this paper.

Drawing on international experience of partnerships in community policing, Oppler (1997:54) states that:

> *(t)he basis of the partnership must be a recognition by all participating agencies that they have something to gain by working together. Just as business partners recognise their joint responsibilities, so each must be able to make a contribution.*

Thus, partnerships can be conceptualised as two or more parties that agree to collaborate and contribute to some joint activity or goal for perceived benefits that may also carry risks. The partners also agree on mechanisms and levels of accountability to each other. A definition being used by the Ford Foundation sponsored Midlands Partnership Programme (MPP) (1997:3) ignores the risk factor while focussing on issues of equality, inclusivity and identity:

> *Partnerships are pro-active, negotiated coalitions formed to address problems devined by the common goals of the participating equal shareholders. Partnerships are inclusive. They incorporate all stake-holders who commit themselves to the common goals. While retaining their own identities, stake-holders bring information, skills and resources; and share tasks and responsibilities, to reach their defined goals.*

On reflection, several components can be isolated:

- Participating stakeholders, who retain their autonomy
- Objectives or goals - to address a need or problem
- Agreements e.g. about sharing, control, accountability, resource inputs, processes
- Activities, including reporting
- Inputs e.g. information, skills, finances
- Outcomes, including benefits and losses

While partnerships are characterised by their negotiated agreements, they are shaped by the common interests and goals of the partners, the circumstances and environmental context that have brought or driven them together and their separate

and collective resources. Long into the period of collaboration, the negotiated agreement may continue to be contested, especially as conditions, context and power relations change and develop over time. Thus, the partnership agreement should not be understood as fixed and only occurring at the outset.

Bongi Mkhabela, a spokesperson from Deputy President Mbeki's office, says that 'almost every government department is working with NGOs, each in its own way - it is very haphazard' (in Boulle, 1997:22). At least four types of public-private partnerships in South Africa are evident: ad hoc or informal arrangements; partnerships formalised following the informal agreement; formal partnerships; and statutory partnerships.

i) Informal partnerships

In practice, informal partnerships occur in an erratic and ad hoc manner. They may be based on a loose agreement struck between individuals on the basis of prior friendships and acquaintance. Trust and goodwill are essential in such partnerships because there is no formalisation of how responsibilities are shared and procedures to resolve disputes.

ii) Formal partnerships

In general, formal public-private partnerships are struck through a competitive tender process in which the state invites non-state organisations/agencies to bid against each other for the provision of a service. Through a supposedly fair selection process, the winning organisation/agency is contracted in a formal agreement with the state. Thus, public-private agreements concerning the outsourcing of services are a formal - albeit financially based partnership. Expectations, timeframes, responsibilities and outcomes are explicit. Committees, such as the Hunter Committee to review the organisation, governance and funding of schools, and task teams set up on the authority of the Minister of Education are also examples of the formal partnership. Participation on these structures is voluntary and derived through a public process of nomination. Appointed members agree to work together to achieve a particular objective within specific parameters and share responsibility for the outcome such as a published report (DoE, 1995a; DoE, 1996).

iii) Post-agreement formalised partnerships

If the disbursement of public funds is involved, tendering procedures (where the value of the project exceeds minimal amounts) and formal agreements are required. However, many collaborative projects originate as informal agreements. In these cases, sharing of responsibility and control may only be determined as events unfold or when the agreement is formalised. Formalisation of the partnership then follows the informal agreement in order to meet auditing and legal requirements of good governance. This may give rise to unforeseen outcomes such as acrimonious disputes, investigations and public scrutiny and a breakdown of the trust evident when the initial informal agreement was struck. The infamous Sarafina II debacle illustrates the problems which may arise through an initial informal partnership approach to projects that require substantial inputs and hence a higher level of formalisation.

iv) Statutory partnerships

The Heads of Education Committee (HEDCOM), the Education Council, SAQA and public school governing bodies are just a few examples of statutory partnerships in which the composition of stakeholders, their goal, powers and functions, benefits and liabilities are unambiguously defined and regulated. Commissions announced in the Government Gazette, such as the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE), the Youth Commission and the Gender Equity Commission, and structures such as the National Training Board and NEDLAC can also be regarded as statutory partnerships. Like the committees and task teams mentioned above, Commission and Board members usually represent a broad range of stakeholders collaborating with ministries and government departments.

Partnerships can be configured in various ways:

- Bipartite agreements involving government and a non-state company/ organisation/agency;
- Multi-agency or multiparty agreements between government e.g. Department of Education, civil society e.g. an NGO and the private sector e.g. a company; and

- Multilevel partnerships in which multi-agency agreements operate at more than one level and may involve sub-structures and/or institutions from one of the partners.

Table 1. Example of a multilevel multi-agency partnership structure

Levels	Government	Civil Society	Private Sector
National		Educational NGO	
Provincial	Dept of Education		Publisher
Local	Schools		

The range of partnership types and configurations, the diverse needs in society and numerous types of organisations and agencies in civil society and the private sector, suggest the possibility of countless permutations of partnerships. Indeed, Oppler (1997:54) confirms:

> *(T)here is no single model of a partnership which can be used in every context. Partnerships will vary widely in their objectives, resources, and results achieved. A principle of local solutions to local issues is important.*

Some reasons for entering into partnerships

Partnerships occur for various reasons, layered as stated and unstated intentions, the latter differing from one partner to another. While there is agreement on the explicit stated objective of the partnership (to address a need or problem), each party may have additional particular objectives linked to a benefit which they intend to gain through the association and activities. These reasons are not usually shared and may not be disclosed. Difficulties will develop in the partnership if the particular unstated objectives of one party are asserted to displace the common shared goal.

Based on a reading of the policy texts cited above and observation of their implementation, there appear to be several reasons for government's support of a partnership strategy.

Firstly, statements in various policy documents and legislation indicate a commitment to democracy through consultative and inclusive processes. This is evident in the

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establishment of statutory structures and their composition, and the requirement for the Minister, MECs and heads of departments to consult with a wide spectrum of stakeholders. One advantage of this is that decision-making processes are more likely to be exposed to and informed by views and perspectives that are unpopular or marginalised and which decision-makers do not necessarily support or want to hear. Statutory partnerships play an important role in an emerging democratic society such as South Africa, in principle providing all relevant stakeholders with equal access to decision-makers - of significant value to those communities who were previously disenfranchised, marginalised and silenced.

Secondly, a partnership strategy brings in other stakeholders to share responsibilities politically or materially with government. The duration of partnership is indefinite.

- Shared *political* responsibility is evident from the composition of various education and training Committees and Task Teams which have been established since 1994. For example, after publicly calling for nominations, the Minister of Education appointed representatives from seventeen diverse stakeholders to the Hunter Committee (DoE, 1995a). The fact that the Committee members shared political responsibility for the published report is indicated by the inclusion of their signatures and their recommendations. This is further supported through disclaimer notes that distance two members from the content of the report. Shared political responsibility is attractive to government especially during a transitional period when there is uncertainty and risk and greater imperatives to develop shared understandings and a common vision.
- Partnership for shared *material* responsibility has become 'a dominant trend in social funding policies' (Greenstein in MacGregor, 1997:17). This reason is based on government's acknowledgement of resource deficiencies. Although public school governing bodies are a statutory partnership for democratic school governance, their legislated functions indicate that material responsibility for much of the teaching and learning at schools is devolved to the governing body. Thus, various stakeholders in the school community are brought together in the governing body to share responsibility for raising and administering funds, administering and controlling school property, preparing budgets, etc., while the state accepts

responsibility for the payment of employees at the school. As government is increasingly driven by economic constraints and intrusive strategies - such as Growth, Employment and Redistribution of Wealth (GEAR) - to pursue partnerships that extend material responsibility to non-state stakeholders, the economic influences will inevitably shift education policies away from partnerships premised on democratic values (e.g. with broad stakeholder representation). Financial and pragmatic concerns (e.g. to where and who has the resources regardless of their values and vision) will be asserted.

A third reason for public-private partnerships is that they can build the state's institutional capacity and expertise e.g. for problem solving. This may occur during strategic planning exercises, conducting strategic changes or when technical expertise is brought in, as is the case with the development of the national curriculum. Non-state partners in some instances may be consultants from local and international development agencies. Such partnerships are usually of a short duration. International partnerships involving foreign agencies (government and non-governmental) and local partners, can influence national education and training policy and practice out of proportion with the extent of the collaboration and the number of people involved. This is probably because partnerships provide opportunities for those involved to learn new competencies.

> *Partnerships have the capacity to reaffirm a culture of community by creating a new, collaborative base of working together, learning together, and earning together* (Fehnel, 1997:1).

The last reason identified in this paper refers to partnerships as an enabling strategy for the state to implement its social project of equity and redress. The present government inherited the apartheid backlog and does not yet have the resources or the capacity to deliver the social services and programmes it wants to provide. Thus the role of non-governmental partners is to fill in on behalf of government as it expands delivery. The stance of government in this case differs from that described in the shared responsibility reason. Here, government accepts responsibility for delivery, but deconcentrates it by outsourcing services and functions on a contractual basis to non-

state agencies such as non-governmental and community-based organisations (NGOs and CBOs) and the private sector. In some cases, the department may have the financial resources but not the personnel. Or in other cases, the department has the policy and strategic plan, while other partners bring in personnel, expertise as well as funds. There are numerous examples of provincial and local level partnerships but at national level one of the most recently publicised partnerships is the School Register of Needs in which the Education Foundation, HSRC and the University of the Free State were commissioned to provide data about South African schools to the national Department of Education. The duration of the partnership is definite although this may be short, medium or long term.

Only the reasons of government are generalised in this paper because there are specific benefits to be derived by each partner in each instance. These are elaborated only in the case of the Read-Mpumalanga Department of Education partnership experience described below.

Power in partnerships

Contrary to the definition proposed by the Midlands Partnership Programme that partners are equal shareholders, all public-private partnerships implicate government in unequal power relations because of its dominant position. Government determines, authorises and legitimates the project, the terms of reference, who its partners will be and defines the desired outcomes. This is the case even in most informal partnerships, and where the state devolves responsibility to a statutory stakeholder structure. Government, therefore, wields considerable power albeit exercised through the support and co-operation of partners.

On the other hand, other partners carry leverage over the state's power to the extent of their inputs, such as resources and expertise which they bring into the partnership. For example, NGOs are often strategically located with access to communities and they may have accumulated years of experience in successfully providing the requisite services - all of which are assets in a partnership. Further, NGOs and companies are able to respond more readily to needs and problems as they arise because of their

organisational flexibility and the absence of bureaucratic decision-making processes - characteristics not found in government departments and institutions. Thus, the composition and orientation of the partners in relation to South Africa's education and training reconstruction and development, and issues such as democracy and GEAR, will be influential determinants in power relations.

Oppler (1997:53) tempers a wilful approach to power by arguing that a partnership approach should emphasise consultative relations. As quoted above, this is a recurring theme in education and training policy texts and thus commits the democratic state to transform institutional power sharing and develop civil servants to assume a new role as accountable professional practitioners and community leaders, harnessing community resources and participation.

Read Educational Trust- Mpumalanga Department of Education (R-MDE) Partnership

Read Educational Trust is a national NGO that develops and provides reading materials for developing communication skills, and trains educators to use the materials. Read has formal partnerships with three provincial departments of education. Only Read's partnership with Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDE) is described in this paper.[2]

The R-MDE partnership was established because of a need for books in the disadvantaged schools of Mpumalanga, and teachers at those schools needed training in how to use books in their classroom teaching of language and communication skills. The agreement involves Read's national and provincial offices in concert with the provincial department, Read's provincial office working with MDE schools at a local level, and the corporate sector which contributes funds to Read's programmes as a 'silent' partner. It is an example of a multi-agency multilevel partnership.

Table 2: R-MDE partners and the levels at which they are involved in agreements

Level	Government	Civil Society	Private Sector
National		Read	(businesses)

[2]This information is based on an interview with Cynthia Hugo, National Executive Director of Read Educational Trust, held on 23/07/1997 in Johannesburg.

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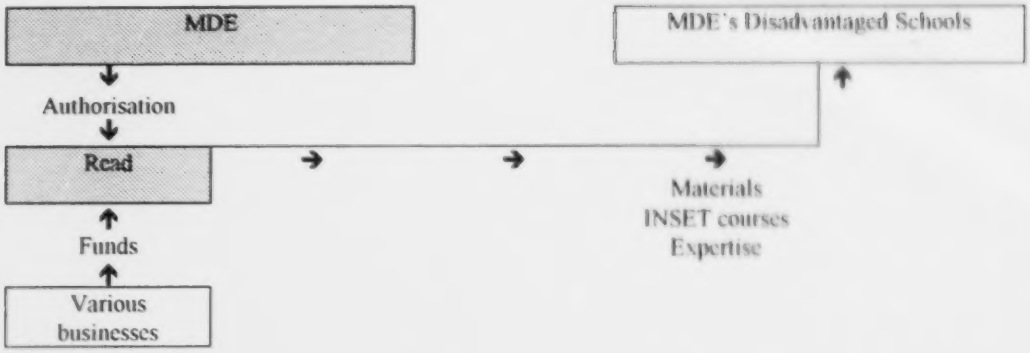
Provincial	Mpumalanga Dept. of Education	Read	
Institutional	School		

The present partnership is based on an earlier one that began in 1990 with the Department of Education and Culture of the KaNgwane homeland. This pre-1994 collaboration appears to have been a post-agreement formalised partnership because it arose through the friendship of Read's executive director with Enos Mabuza, leader of the former homeland. In formalising the partnership, Read was contracted by the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) to provide reading materials to KaNgwane schools. Read had a policy of not working with the apartheid regime's education departments thus the KaNgwane DBSA agreement, driven by personal contacts, was an exception. Read states that the past partnership was not as transparent and accountable as its current R-MDE partnership which is institutionally based.

The present partnership is allegedly attractive to the MDE because it enables Read to continue the much needed service to Mpumalanga's disadvantaged schools as MDE's school library services directorate is still under-resourced and busy with restructuring and incorporating personnel from ex-departments. Although Read took the initiative in the R-MDE partnership, Read claims that it was its successful delivery of service to ex-KaNgwane schools which persuaded the MDE to agree to a continuation of the service.

As input to the partnership, Read's contribution of expertise, materials and sourced funding is substantial and a winning combination, enabling the MDE to discharge its responsibility of delivering services to schools. In effect, MDE is outsourcing the service by authorising Read to substitute for the Department. Power, in this situation, appears to be balanced between authority and resources. However, without any input of resources on the part of the MDE, there is a risk of dependency.



Only Read and MDE (shaded) are partners in the agreement. However, there are indications from some corporate managers that they desire active participation in projects through representation on planning committee structures. The reasons for this are unclear, but speculation could include issues of control (power), negative perceptions of Departments' capacities to manage, and - as black managers take more senior positions - a corporate sector that identifies more directly with disadvantaged communities.

The outcomes of the service provided by Read to MDE schools include various benefits for beneficiaries within the Department and school community.

Benefits	Derived by
1. Improvements in quality of teaching and learning	School learners
2. Improvements in learning performance	School learners
3. Greater self-esteem and confidence leading to greater professionalism and empowerment	Teachers and school supervisors
4. Developing resource base at the school	School learners and teachers
5. Attitudinal changes	School community
6. Shared vision and common educational goals	School community and education managers
7. Increased delivery of educational services	MDE
8. Capacity building	MDE

Read claims to derive two benefits:

- Legitimacy and status within a market competing to provide services and develop materials for departments of education; and

- The altruistic reward of achieving its social and pedagogic goals, i.e. providing disadvantaged learners with opportunities to develop primarily English language communication competence in order to improve their chances in adult life.

Factors that limit partnership and effective partnerships

The problems identified below are based primarily on Read's partnership experiences.

i. The transition in South Africa from apartheid to democracy and the young and still weak condition of many departments of education, make the formation of public-private partnerships compelling. However, there are no standardised mechanisms and procedures which facilitate partnership building and to the aspirant partner there is little clarity about departmental structures, who has responsibility and authority to make decisions, and how the lines of communication operate. In many cases middle and lower managers cannot take initiative and have to get permission from their head office. This leads to ad hoc partnerships fraught with problems. Based on its experience over several years, Read stresses that partnerships can only be established and continue if departments develop mechanisms or procedures that enable them to outsource the delivery of services.

ii. Changes in departmental personnel - some taking voluntary severance packages and early retirements, some as new appointments - is unsettling and frustrates non-state partners. A lack of continuity among departmental representatives delays project definition and agreement, requiring other partners to repeat the conceptualisation, motivation and perhaps renegotiate the terms.

iii. In some cases, bureaucrats remaining from the ex-departments are not dedicated to the task of developing partnerships and retain the mindset of an authoritarian, non-consultative approach characteristic of the former education paradigm.

iv. Establishing agreement and decisions on terms of reference, etc., takes time and may require attendance of many departmental meetings and compliance with bureaucratic procedures. This frustrates non-state partners who operate on a

payment for services basis and prefer to be busy at learning sites with project activities.

v. The national Constitution of South Africa provides concurrent powers to national and provincial governments. In some cases this has led to a lack of clarity between the responsibilities of national and provincial departments of education so that aspirant non-state partners are uncertain about which department to approach.

vi. Funding is not as readily available from the national and international community as in the past. This is because they either lack confidence in departments of education ability to sustain projects, or because they want (as a prerequisite) that the departments give clarity about the state's contribution and commitment to projects. This has led to some corporate funders indicating that they want to be involved in projects as a proactive and not a silent third partner.

vii. The economic factors that drive government to share material responsibility and the demand from communities for government to improve delivery of education and training create a tension that has potential to disempower government agencies and build dependency on non-state partners.

viii. Sharing power equally is difficult to put into practice when ultimate power resides with the state.

In closing

The most significant step that will release the potential for partnerships in South Africa's education and training system and enhance the capacities of partners to contribute on a basis where there is respect for autonomy and equal sharing, is to develop procedural guidelines for establishing partnerships. Indeed, it is procedural matters that present the greatest possibility of contestation and disputes. Guidelines can be enhanced by a code of conduct to ensure accountability and transparency.

Secondly, many NGOs and CBOs are keen to be partners in education and training joint ventures, but the tender procedures are alienating and inaccessible. The state

should work towards developing simpler mechanisms that enhance NGO and CBO access to partnerships through a tender process.

Lastly, if Departments of Education are committed to partnerships, they need to address the perceptions of aspirant partners and the apparent lack of clarity about lines of authority and communication within their offices. The appointment of one partnership liaison officer would provide better co-ordination and act as a clearinghouse for such information.

Acknowledgement

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